

April 28, 2006

TO: All Commissioned Corps Officers

FROM: Director, OFRD

SUBJECT: Deployment Role and Response Team Selection/Application

Much has transpired in the last few months related to the readiness and response of the Commissioned Corps. One of the most important documents related to readiness and response is the recent White House Publication, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*. Specifically, recommendation 57.c from the report states, "HHS should organize, train, equip, and roster medical and public health professionals in pre-configured and deployable teams". The Department has convened several workgroups to address this and other recommendations applicable to the Corps.

The Corps will develop four "tiers" of response, with different expectations placed on officers in each tier. BEFORE OFFICERS ARE FINALLY PLACED ON TIER ONE OR TIER TWO TEAMS, SUPERVISORY CONCURRENCE WILL BE OBTAINED BY OFRD.

- **Tier One** will involve five Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) teams and ten Secretary's Emergency Response Teams (SERTs). Individuals assigned to Tier One will be expected to report to a point of departure within 12 hours of notification.

The **RDFs**, composed of 105 officers each, will be centered in 4 locations.

- A) PHS-1 RDF and PHS-2 RDF will utilize officers within 200 miles of Washington, DC.
- B) PHS-3 RDF will include officers within 200 miles of Atlanta, but will also include officers within 200 miles of Raleigh/Durham.
- C) PHS-4 RDF will include officers within 200 miles of Dallas, but also include officers within 200 miles of Oklahoma City.
- D) PHS-5 RDF will include officers within 200 miles of Phoenix, but also include officers within 200 miles of Albuquerque.

This geographic focus is because the ability to rapidly gather in a centralized location to train and deploy as a unit is important. The RDFs will have a clinical focus, with some applied public health personnel, as well as embedded leadership and management staff.

Another component of Tier One will be 10 **SERTs**, composed of 30 officers each. A SERT will be centered in each of the PHS Regional Offices, but may include officers anywhere within the Region. The SERTs will provide oversight, management, and liaison activities for field operations.

- **Tier Two** will involve five Applied Public Health Teams (APHTs), and five Mental Health Teams (MHTs). The memberships of these teams will be geographically dispersed. Individuals assigned to Tier Two will be expected to report to a point of departure within 36 hours of notification.

The **APHTs** will be composed of 47 officers with skills that reflect the functions found in public health departments. Each APHT will be capable of replacing or augmenting a decimated county health department.

The **MHTs** will be composed of 26 officers each, and will be capable of providing mental health/behavioral health services after a disaster or as a consequence of an urgent public health need.

For a thumbnail sketch of the Commissioned Corps Response Team Structure, Personnel, and Missions, go to

http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/response_team_description.htm

- Those not placed on Tier One or Tier Two response teams will be placed in **Tier Three**, which will include every other active duty officer in the Commissioned Corps. Individuals assigned to Tier Three will be expected to report to a point of departure within 72 hours of notification. Tier Three personnel can expect to be deployed on a regular basis, either to augment Tier 1 or Tier 2 teams, or to provide specific requested skills when required. For example, if a state requests 20 nurses to provide inpatient services at an overwhelmed hospital, those nurses will come from Tier Three rather than remove all the nurses from a RDF team, thus removing a critical resource from the RDF such that it can no longer function as a unit.
- All active duty officers in the Corps will be placed in one of these three response tiers. All officers will be assigned to a rotating schedule of months such that one fifth of the Corps will be on call every fifth month. The current rosters will no longer be valid as of July 1, 2006. Once determined, it is essential that all officers inform their supervisors of their rotation schedule so that scheduling, work assignments, and leave requests can be considered, thus avoiding potential conflicts for the Agency, the officer, and the response mission.
- An **exception**: The Secretary has indicated that some officers shall be designated as “mission critical” by their agencies, and as such would only be asked to deploy in extreme circumstances. Those designations have been received from agencies. Although mission critical officers will be placed in Tier Three, they will not be on a monthly rotation, nor will they deploy except in those extreme events. In the event of an extreme circumstance, officers detailed to the Coast Guard may only be deployed in support of an HHS mission with the permission of the Coast Guard Director of Health and Safety.

- **Tier Four** will involve officers in the Inactive Reserve Corps.

In order to better place officers in appropriate deployment role(s), by May 12, 2006, all Active Duty Corps officers should go to the following website –

http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/ofrd_officer_questionnaire.htm - record your name and PHS Ser No, and indicate:

- The response tier / team for which you wish to be considered, keeping in mind the geographic requirements for the RDFs and SERTs.
- Then answer the questions related to your responsibilities, training, skills, and experience. You may indicate one or multiple deployment roles for which you want to be considered. You will be assigned role(s) depending on your answers to the questions.
- Officers who do not choose roles will be assigned a role per the needs of the Department.

Your response tier selection and deployment role "application" will be shared with response Team Leaders for their review. You will be given priority consideration for the tier and role preferences indicated. If you are not selected for the preferred tier, you will automatically be considered for the next lower tier for which there is a need for your selected role. Once completed, OFRD will contact your supervisor to confirm that they will support your tier placement. Be sure your supervisor's correct email address is on your Officer Summary Page at <http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf>. Without an accurate supervisory email address, we have no choice but to place you in Tier 3. Your agency liaison will be copied on this information.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to the USPHS Commissioned Corps. I look forward to hearing from you.

RADM John Babb
Assistant Surgeon General